

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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SUBJ: MUNICIPAL WORKERS STRIKE

REF: LUSAKA A-29

1. MUNICIPAL WORKERS IN THE COPPERBELT CITY OF KITWE WENT ON ILLEGAL STRIKE MONDAY, AUGUST 21, IN PROTEST OVER DELAYS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF STANDARIZED SALARIES AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY EMPLOYEES. THE STRIKE SPREAD TO CHINGOLA ON AUGUST 22, AND LUSAKA MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES WALKED OFF THE JOB AUGUST 24 AND BEGAN TO PICKET CITY HALL. OFFICIALS OF THE WORKERS' UNION, THE ZAMBIA UNITED LOCAL AUTHORITIES WORKERS UNION (ZULAWU), ASKED THEIR MEMBERS IN ALL THREE CITIES TO GO BACK TO WORK UNTIL ZULAWU COMPLETED ON-GOING NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING. AS HAS BEEN THE CASE IN A NUMBER OF RECENT JOB ACTIONS (REFAIR), THE UNION MEMBERS IGNORED THE CALLS OF THEIR LEADERSHIP.

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2. THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS OF SEVERAL ARRESTS IN KITWE, BUT SO FAR THE STRIKES IN ALL THREE CITIES HAVE BEEN WITHOUT VIOLENCE. AS FAR AS WE ARE AWARE, POLICE AND MILITARY PERSONNEL IN RIOT GEAR ON STAND-BY HAVE NOT BEEN PUT INTO ACTION. STRIKE CALLS WERE ALSO ISSUED IN NDOLA AND LIVINGSTONE, BUT WORKERS THERE WERE CONVINCED BY LOCAL UNION OFFICIALS TO STAY ON THE JOB WHILE NEGOTIATIONS ARE CONTINUING.

3. TROUBLE BETWEEN THE UNION AND THE MINISTRY BEGAN BREWING EARLY IN JULY WHEN OFFICIALS OF THE ORGANIZATIONS, IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION, WERE UNABLE TO REACH AGREEMENT ON A MINISTRY PROPOSAL ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF WAGES AND FRINGE BENEFITS. ZULAWU NATIONAL CHAIRMAN HUBERT BWEUPE AT THAT TIME THREATENED THAT THE UNION WOULD CALL A NATION-WIDE STRIKE OF ITS MEMBERS IF ZULAWU DEMANDS WERE NOT MET. MINISTER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING JOSEPHAT SIYOMUNJI SAID THAT HE WOULD SUBMIT ANOTHER PROPOSAL BY THE END OF AUGUST WHICH WOULD TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE ZULAWU CONCERNS.

4. A MEETING OF THE UNION, MINISTRY, AND COMMISSION WAS SCHEDULED FOR AUGUST 27. APPARENTLY THE WORD DID NOT FILTER DOWN TO THE LOCAL LEVEL AND STRIKE TALK WAS AGAIN REPORTED ON AUGUST 18. NATIONAL UNION OFFICIALS WERE APPARENTLY TAKEN SOMEWHAT BY SURPRISE WHEN THE KITWE WORKERS ACTUALLY WENT ON STRIKE THREE DAYS LATER. ZULAWU CHAIRMAN BWEUPE APPEALED TO ALL WORKERS TO REFRAIN FROM STRIKE ACTION AND HIS CALL WAS ECHOED BY THE LEADERSHIP OF THE ZAMBIA CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS (ZCTU). BWEUPE SAID THAT HE WAS "OPTIMISTIC" THAT A SATISFACTORY SOLUTION COULD BE ACHIEVED IN THE AUGUST 27 MEETING, AND EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THE STRIKES WOULD BE PREJUDICIAL TO THE NEGOTIATIONS. MINISTER SIYOMUNJI TOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE THAT HIS MINISTRY WAS DOING EVERYTHING IN ITS POWER TO REACH AN ACCEPTABLE SOLUTION TO THE SALARIES PROBLEM, BUT WARNED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NOT "BE HELD RANSOM" BY THE STRIKE ACTION.

5. COMMENT: SOME CHARGES HAVE BEEN MADE THAT THE STRIKES WERE POLITICALLY INSPIRED IN ORDER TO EMBARRASS THE GOVERNMENT DURING THE TIME LEADING UP TO NATIONAL ELECTIONS. WHILE THAT MIGHT BE THE CASE REGARDING THE COPPERBELT TOWNS, IT IS LESS LIKELY TO BE TRUE FOR THE CAPITAL. THE ROOT CAUSE IS WORKER DISSATISFACTION WITH WAGES WHICH ARE FROZEN AT A TIME WHEN PRICES ARE RISING RAPIDLY, AND THE SITUATION IS COMPOUNDED BY A LACK OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE, THE NATIONAL UNION LEADERSHIP, AND THE EMPLOYEES. WHILE POLITICS CERTAINLY PLAY A PART IN THE STRIKES, THE ECONOMICS OF THE SITUATION ARE TAILOR MADE FOR DEMONSTRATIONS OF DISCONTENT. CLINGERMAN

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